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By Misty Edgecomb, Of the NEWS Staff [e-mail Misty](#)  
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## Maine ranks low on 'dirtiest' power plants list

*Report: Midwest likely source of state's air quality problems*

Only one Maine power plant appears on a new list of America's 548 "dirtiest" power plants released Tuesday by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. In fact, Maine ranks no higher than 44th for the amount of air pollution released by its power plants - the major source of pollutants that have been linked to acid rain, ozone depletion, smog and global warming. Yet the state continues to struggle in its attempts to comply with federal air quality laws.

Tuesday's report, like dozens before it, indicates that many of the air quality problems that plague Maine are imported from the Mid-Atlantic states and the Midwest. The report cites Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia power plants for some of the nation's highest emissions - pollution that follows prevailing winds straight into Maine, said Matthew Davis, New England spokesman for the research group.

The report, titled "Lethal Legacy," considered about half of the nation's power plants, all those that in 2002 emitted 20 tons or more of "excess pollutants," which U.S. PIRG contends could have been eliminated with the installation of pollution-control equipment. Author Brandon Wu relied on the power plants' own 2002 pollutant emission reports to the EPA for his data.

The sole Maine plant to make the list was Wyman Station, an oil-burning plant located in Yarmouth. Maine's seven other power plants were considered "clean" by the research group.

In 2002, Wyman reported emitting 1,982 tons of sulfur dioxide and 564 tons of nitrogen oxides. The report states that 65 percent of these sulfur dioxide emissions and 39 percent of the nitrogen oxides emissions could be eliminated if the plant were forced to upgrade its pollution controls.

The Wyman plant also emitted 397,061 tons of carbon dioxide last year. Carbon dioxide is not regulated as a pollutant, however, many scientists believe it is a major factor in global warming. Earlier this year, Maine joined several other states in filing suit against the federal government, demanding the Environmental Protection Agency regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

While Wyman ranks far better than the nation's dirtiest plants - large facilities where emissions are hundreds of times higher - environmental groups have attacked the facility for being "the dirtiest power plant in Maine."

"Despite the fact that it pales in comparison to some of the huge plants in the Midwest, [Wyman] is still of major concern to local air quality," Davis said Tuesday.

But according to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Wyman is in compliance with state and federal regulations and licensing requirements. The plant may be polluting, but it is doing so legally.

Nationwide, the plants on U.S. PIRG's list produced about 64 percent of all sulfur dioxide and 20 percent of all nitrogen oxides emitted from all sources nationwide. In each case, the majority of this pollution is characterized as "excess" in the report.

"Even I was shocked at how much pollution we'd be able to stop if we installed modern pollution controls," Davis said. "There are literally tons of pollution that could just be taken out of the air."

The release of the report was timed to coincide with Congressional debate over air quality policy. Several bills with the support of countless national environmental groups are under consideration in Washington.

This week, the Senate is expected to debate and likely vote on the Climate Stewardship Act. The measure, written by Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., is intended to address global warming by imposing limits on the emission of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides. Maine Republican Sen. Olympia Snowe is a co-sponsor of the measure.

"The slow but devastating change of our global climate could have long-term effects on a number of Maine industries, on public health and on the Maine coastline itself," Snowe said in a statement released Tuesday. "What we need is a national approach as a first step to emissions reductions for solutions that are environmentally and economically sound."

Fellow Republican Sen. Susan Collins said Tuesday that she also plans to support the bill.

"We need to start taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," she said Tuesday. Collins also is promoting the Clean Power Act, a piece of legislation that she co-sponsored to cut power plant emissions of nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, mercury and carbon dioxide by one-third by 2009.

"That would target the source of these emissions - these horrible coal-powered plants in the Midwest," she said.

Although the bill was approved in committee last year it since has stalled. Collins is doubtful it can be approved this year, but plans to push for reconsideration next year.